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ABSTRACT

The assessment process and its impact on how college teachers teach and work together is explored through the personal recollections and perspectives of a teacher. The discussion touches on how the principles of assessment effect every aspect of teaching: syllabus development, classroom effectiveness, relationships with students and colleagues in the department, and across the institution. Examples are given which help illustrate the assessment process in helping students get answers to their questions of what is expected of them and where the instruction is going. Additional stories relate to how assessments influence how teachers work with one another and how it prompts conversation about student learning that otherwise would not take place at all, or only on the most sporadic basis, or in ways that have little chance of finding their way into institutional decision making. This is viewed as one of the most powerful effects of assessments. The culture of assessment is discussed from the viewpoints that it assures that teaching is taken seriously and rewarded, that it values teaching, and that it provides accountability. Finally, future needs in the area of assessment are discussed. (GLR)

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Because You're a Member

Just a few weeks ago, the AAHE Assessment Forum's fifth national Conference on Assessment in Higher Education came to a close. By any measure, it was a resounding success: we had a record-breaking attendance of over 1400, and the evaluations have been wonderful. Over and over again, conference goers told me they were delighted with the quality and sophistication of both the presentations and the audience discussion that followed.

We'd like to share with you one of the high points of that conference: Pat Hutchings's closing plenary address, "Assessment and the Way We Work." It's an outstanding statement of what we think assessment should be and how assessment can improve American higher education. It's also an example of the kind of educational values that AAHE stands for.

So sit back and enjoy this reprint of Pat's address—with our compliments. And have a great summer.

Barbara D. Wright
Director
AAHE Assessment Forum

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American Association for Higher Education

Closing Plenary Address
Fifth AAHE Conference on Assessment
June 30, 1990

Assessment and the Way We Work

by Pat Hutchings

It's clear now that assessment isn't going away, but how will it change our work on campus? What conception of undergraduate learning does it imply? How can it alter the ways we think about and work with students—or with one another? What kind of academic community does assessment call for? And what will it take in the next five years to ensure that these questions have answers we can live with?

Twelve years ago, a still-damp Ph.D. in hand, I went looking for a job. The job market was tight—it was the worst of times for the humanities—and after living in the north woods of Wisconsin for a year to write my dissertation, I started sending letters to colleges in the upper Midwest—places I could go for interviews at my own expense. My companion in this was *Peterson's* guide: I started with institutions at the top of the alphabet and got all the way through *F* before I quit in despair.

But lo and behold, my despair was hasty. A few weeks later I found in the mailbox a letter from a place I only barely remembered from the *A*'s: Alverno College. They had a position, would I like to come down to Milwaukee and talk about it? . . .

I spent the next nine years at Alverno—and as an audience full of assessment practitioners would certainly know, those nine years included a lot of assessment.

I look back and see, more clearly than I did then, how much the presence of assessment at Alverno was linked to the ways we did our work there—*all* of us, faculty, staff, administrators, and students. And that's what I want to talk about today: assessment and the way we work.

I want to walk my way into that topic by recalling a few experiences at Alverno . . . particularly during my first semester, when the characteristics and conditions of the way we worked there were still new to me and therefore visible . . . and in some ways startling.

There was, for instance, the matter of the syllabus. EnII4: Introduction to Literature was one of my first-semester assignments, and I set enthusiastically about the task of constructing a syllabus. Things were going along nicely when I began to realize that what I was doing—listing books and when they were to be read, as every syllabus I'd ever seen did—was not quite what my experienced colleagues were doing. I got talking with one of them in the hall about which of the way-too-many stories in the anthology I was using would work best, and I was asking her whether John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse" wasn't a neat choice. Students would like that wouldn't they? And she said, Well, *she* certainly liked the story . . . and we should talk about Barth sometime. And as to the syllabus, well, let's see . . . what was I trying to *accomplish*

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during the class session in question?

Now I don't want to make myself sound greener than I was. But the fact is that my colleague's comment that day was one of those seemingly small things that one comes to see as a benchmark. Here I'd been thinking that the challenge of the literature classes I'd be teaching was to get the class *through* fifteen weeks of short stories . . . now I find that they're supposed to *learn* something. And following from that, that part of my job was to tell students what, as a result of all those stories read and discussions had, they would know by the end of my course . . . and beyond that, to give an account of how I and they would know whether they were indeed learning those things.

I need hardly say that these had not been the principles at work in my recently completed graduate courses. But they *were* principles that made sense. And, as I came to see, their good sense worked not only for students but for me. Getting clear in the way that assessment demands about what you want students to learn can be a long and frustrating experience. But, as another Alverno colleague said to me years later, it's also a great relief, down the line, to look at the foot-high stack of student papers on the corner of your desk and not to wonder, Why did I assign this one?

So that was the syllabus.

And then there was the matter of off-campus experiential learning. That's OCEL, another of my first-semester teaching assignments, this one with a team of faculty from various disciplines whose students were engaged in off-campus work where they were to apply and test out and refine what they learned in classes in their major. Once again I found myself in the midst of questions I'd never considered. Questions not just about the kind of learning that might be expected from an introductory literature class or even from the English major, but questions about how that learning would contribute to the student's ability to perform *beyond* the field of literature, even beyond the *campus*. What difference, for instance, would the fact that an English major had read (let us say) "Lost in the Funhouse," or any number of short stories, make in the way she did her work at a project at the Milwaukee Historical Society? What did all those discussions of and that writing about literature add up to in terms of her ability to make sense of the archival material she was working with? How did it affect her ability to work with professional colleagues?

I don't pretend even now (especially now) to have neat answers to those questions, but asking them was, again, an eye-opener. Moreover, because there were students in the OCEL seminar from a variety of disciplines, I found myself confronted as well with questions about "larger outcomes" that cut across disciplines and departments (the ability to learn from one's own experience was a key item) and about my responsibility for seeing that students achieved those outcomes . . . and *teaching* toward them.

And then we come to my writing lab, where, through various specified steps, students worked on papers for other courses. This lab was unusual, however, in that my job was not only to help the student do her best job on those papers and learn from the process of writing them, but also to collaborate with the instructor who had assigned the paper (a sociologist, let us say); to sit down with that sociologist at various points in the semester and come to a shared judgment about whether our mutual student was meeting our agreed upon expectations—*our* expectations, which were also the agreed upon expectations of the *college*, for which all of us as faculty were responsible . . . together . . . this, if you will, the corollary to the point above about cross-cutting outcomes: shared responsibility for those outcomes. Shared too—and not just incidentally—with the student, whose assessment of her own strengths and weaknesses as a writer was part of what I and her instructor took into account in evaluating her performance.

So, it was an interesting first semester. The second semester was pretty interesting too. In March, I was invited to sit down with my division chair to talk about how things were going, and to negotiate a contract for the coming year. What—I was asked—were my goals as a teacher? What progress had I made toward those so far? What evidence did I have of that progress? What had I learned from colleagues who visited my classes as peer evaluators? What would I be working on next year? And we looked at and talked about the criteria for successful teaching performance at the assistant-professor level as set forth in the faculty handbook, where I found, too,

statements about the college's expectation that in the future I would be evaluated not only on the basis of effectiveness in my *own* classroom but in terms of my contributions to our collective effectiveness as teachers across the institution. Interestingly, I don't think I was particularly startled by that point back in 1978—it was completely consistent with everything else that was happening—but it seems more than a little surprising now. What an idea: that teachers should be responsible for one another's teaching!

In talking about performance review (as I learned much later to call it), the writing lab, the experiential learning seminar, that first syllabus, I'm zooming in very selectively on what is, of course, a much bigger, more complicated landscape. I mention these features of work at Alverno because they seem to me to get at the very heart of assessment—which is not, finally, a matter of methods or mandates but a way of thinking about learning:

- thinking of learning as the aim and even the test of teaching;
- recognizing and teaching for types of learning that transcend the individual course;
- assuming shared responsibility for that learning; and
- at the institutional level, thinking of learning as the end—the valued and rewarded end—toward which other things are consistently aimed.

Let me turn now from Alverno to a more general discussion of how these principles of assessment—for that's what I understand them to be—play themselves out in the way we work—alone in our offices struggling with a syllabus, in classes with students, with colleagues in the department, and across the institution. I want to talk about how assessment is connected to, helps us see, and maybe even changes, our work with students and one another and the conditions that make that work *work*.

Work With Students

The best account I've heard of how assessment changes the way we work with students comes from a faculty member from a community college, a teacher of writing, who wrote to the AAHE Assessment Forum to say, "Assessment means to me, asking whether my students are learning what I think I'm teaching."

As I say, I like that question very much; it puts in a nutshell many of the insights I was coming to at Alverno that first year. But there are other questions that might be cited here as well. They'll sound familiar to you, I think:

- What do I have to do to get an *A*?
- Why do we have to do this paper?
- Why don't you just tell us what you're looking for?
- Where is this course going, anyway?
- Do we have to know this?

Those are, of course, students' questions—and not, I'd like to propose, the questions of grumblers only, but of *good* students who quite reasonably want to know what's expected of them and where things are going; and they're questions, too, of students who could be a whole lot *better* if they understood the answers. They're questions that assessment speaks to very directly, as the following two examples show.

The first is a project supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) being undertaken by 10 (and over the next two years 20, and then 30) community colleges in California, all part of LARC, the Learning Assessment Retention Consortium that began several years ago to collaborate on the assessment of entry-level skills. This past year a number of LARC institutions got interested in looking not just at entering abilities but at outcomes down the line. And they wanted to look at "outcomes" in a way that took advantage of faculty's interest in and commitment to teaching. What they turned to is K. Patricia Cross's concept of Classroom Assessment.

I visited the group earlier this spring and got to hear them talk with one another about what happens when faculty and students engage in the small-scale, in-class assessment methods that Pat and her colleague Tom Angelo have proposed.

There was, for instance, the chemistry professor from Cuesta College who confessed to the group that though he was an experienced teacher (and obviously one who cared a lot about students), he was feeling like a beginner with this assessment stuff, not sure that he was "doing it right." . . . But the more he and his colleagues talked, the clearer it was that something important was happening that was changing the way these faculty

were working with students.

Like several others in the group, this professor was using the "one-minute paper," where students write briefly at the end of the class about what they understood that day, and what they're still not clear about. And he talked to the group about what he was learning about his students—about how they think about the problems he assigns, where they get stuck, where breakthroughs occur. "I just never knew this much about my students' thinking," he told us. Wanting to understand more, I asked him, "So, the power of Classroom Assessment is in giving you more information about students. Is that right?" And he paused and said, "Well, yes, it's information. But really, you know, the bigger difference is that I never thought to *ask* these questions before."

At the risk of putting words in this fine man's mouth, I can't help but note that he was having the same insight I had at Alverno as I worked at my syllabus that first semester—that as soon as you ask, as assessment does, Are students getting it?, you're also asking yourself to be much clearer about what that *it* is, what you expect, where you're aiming . . . and the whole enterprise gets more purposeful and focused. That line of thinking isn't an easy one; it's not one most of us were ever trained to undertake. But it sure can change the way faculty and students work together.

Faculty at SUNY-Fredonia (my second example) have come, I think, to a similar conclusion.

For several years now, with FIPSE funding, Fredonia has been assessing a new general-education program, and they've chosen to go the local route in all cases, with faculty-designed exams to cover a variety of cross-cutting, general-education outcomes. I think that's a right idea, and when I visited there several years ago it looked like things were going well, and so I was dying to read, as I finally did this winter, their final report to FIPSE. In that report they set forth what they've learned—and equally interesting, what they didn't learn.

They didn't, for instance, ever learn the Truth about their students. In fact, much of their work at the outset entailed discussion—and I dare say heated debate—about the soundness of this and that instrument, pilot testing, whether the results could be compared this way or that, what was valid, what not . . . with the result, as I say, that no Truth was learned. What faculty *did* learn was that whether the score was 37 or 43 (a debate that can go forever), students weren't doing as well in "reflexive thinking" as faculty thought they should. That is, students were taking and passing individual courses alright, but they weren't seeing connections; they couldn't put the pieces together.

The solution? No doubt there were (and should be) several. But interestingly, one of their next steps at Fredonia is more assessment. Faculty are now working to develop a portfolio approach to assessment that will give them more in-depth information about each student's ability to put the pieces together, but also—and here's the beauty of the thing—help the student *develop* that ability.

Portfolios are kept by students themselves and include work done through the four—or whatever—years. The first piece, done at entry and used for advising, is "My History as a Learner," an essay where the student is asked (i.e., told that at Fredonia they will be *expected*) to self-reflect, to be conscious of what they do as learners. Intermediate pieces in the portfolio are, I believe, pulled from various course settings; the final entry is an essay in which students look back on all that work and are asked to put the pieces together, addressing, in particular, questions about how general education is connected to the major.

It is, as I say, a way of gathering very rich information about students. More important, it's a method that's for teaching first, assessment second . . . or that blurs the difference. Finally, it's a method that recognizes that the coherence of the curriculum has to reside not only in *our* neat schemes but in the student's ability to make connections and create coherence, an ability that can be attended to, focused on as an expectation, taught for, assessed, and improved.

These accounts of work being done in the LARC group and at Fredonia risk making things seem smoother than they are: People from the institutions in question may, I'm aware, be squirming in the audience. My intent is not to suggest that they've somehow got things righter than the rest of the world but to say instead that I *do* see in both projects (and in many

more featured at this conference) some ways of thinking that have the potential to change the way we work with students . . . by making learning the test of teaching; by nudging us into a clearer view of that learning; by finding ways to communicate that view to students, to let them know, through statements in syllabi and through the assignments and assessments we give, what we expect, that we expect a lot, that we and they are going to meet those expectations.

By way of summary to this section on the way we work with students, I offer a comment that my colleague Barbara Wright, director of the AAHE Assessment Forum, made recently in response to a draft of something I was writing. I was getting heated up over the fact that the burden for learning so often falls so exclusively on students. "Students responsible for learning, . . ." Barbara wrote in the margin (I could imagine her eyebrow cocking). "Not a bad idea." It isn't, and assessment, if you will, agrees. It speaks to a shared responsibility between faculty and students. It calls on us to create conditions in which students can carry out that responsibility, where they don't have to ask, Where is this course going? What are you looking for? What am I learning here, anyway?

Work With One Another

Stories about how we work with students are, of course, also stories about how we work with one another. In fact, Pat Cross has remarked that something she didn't anticipate about Classroom Assessment—one attraction of which would be that it could be done alone—is that faculty no sooner get into asking the kinds of questions the LARC faculty were excited about, than they want to talk to and hear from colleagues who, it turns out, are also interested in those questions . . . and dying to talk about them.

What we see in those cases and on scores of campuses is one of assessment's most powerful and in many cases immediate effects: the prompting of a conversation about student learning that otherwise takes place not at all, or only on the most sporadic basis, or in ways that have little chance of finding their way into institutional decision making.

I'm thinking here of a hundred stories I've heard. From a faculty member in the art history department at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, for instance. She said it was only when faced with assessment—in this case a state-mandated requirement to examine the outcomes of the major—that faculty in her department "for the first time sat down and talked with one another," not altogether happily, mind you, about what goes on in their respective classes, what's covered and (one hopes) uncovered, what the aims of various courses are, what assignments are given . . . all of that otherwise behind-the-doors stuff that assessment opens onto.

And I think about a man I met during a visit to the University of Connecticut. An English professor, far from convinced that assessment was the best thing in town, who said he's stuck with the work of the assessment committee because it is "the one place on campus where there was a serious conversation about student learning going on."

And I think about Harvard. Some of you may know the Harvard assessment story from the NY *Times*—the front page no less—where a report on the Harvard Assessment Seminars appeared a few months ago. Or better yet you may know it from the May *AAHE Bulletin*, where editor Ted Marchese interviews the convener of those seminars, Richard Light.

It's work that goes back to 1986, when Harvard president Derek Bok urged in his book *Higher Learning* that every college "study the learning process and assess the effects of its programs." To that end, on his own campus, he asked Richard Light, a faculty member in the Kennedy School and the Graduate School of Education, to convene a seminar on undergraduate learning—to which more than 100 faculty and administrators were soon drawn.

Interestingly, the story of the seminars, which were held over three years and still go on, is very similar to that of the LARC Classroom Assessment project. Though there have been "findings" in the Harvard picture, its seminars are best described as "faculty inquiries into student learning."

For example, participants took on questions about the impact of the size of groups in which students study, which led to several experiments conducted by faculty with their own students that showed that students who study in groups of four to six do better academically than

students studying alone.

They looked, too—at the urging of student participants in the seminars—at questions of gender, and discovered that women students at Harvard have an experience rather different from men's.

In the *Bulletin* interview, Ted Marchese says to Dick Light, Well, now, that's all very nice—these findings about gender and about study in groups—but it certainly isn't news. Light has a great comeback (exactly the one Ted was after, I suspect): "Newness," Light replies, "is hardly the goal here; we're after locally useful information and small but steady increments of improvement." He knows, he says, "that similar findings, some from earlier decades, exist in the library, but there is a power, an immediacy, that comes out of your own discoveries." The upshot is that long-time, long-tenured faculty are now talking to one another about how students learn, and doing things as a result that they didn't do two years ago—among them Pat Cross's "one-minute paper."

The point? It's not that Harvard has made some quantum leap forward in quality; it's that assessment has helped create an occasion to take up, collectively, questions about learning and the conditions under which it can occur best.

At Harvard, UTK, UConn, and scores of other campuses, assessment has changed the way we work by getting us talking to one another, across all kinds of lines and boundaries, coming to clearer, more collective visions of our aims and purposes, asking questions together about whether we're achieving those purposes and how we might do better.

Alverno is an interesting footnote here: By my lights, one of the most important things Alverno has done—more important than any single assessment innovation the college is admired for—is to set aside Friday afternoons for faculty to work together on questions of teaching and learning . . . questions prompted and then illuminated by assessment.

The Culture of Assessment

Thinking about assessment's impact on the way we work with students and with one another, we come to a deeper question, one about the kind of culture—the conditions—in which our best work can go forward. What kind of culture is that? What habits of mind and deeper structures make the work called for by assessment work?

In some ways I think this Assessment Conference is an answer to that question. As I've gone from session to session over the last three days, I've been struck that underlying what many of you are doing in the name of assessment is . . . what shall I call it? . . . a view of the world, a subtext, a vision of what our institutions might be like, a set of educational values. Assessment is not, I've come to believe, just a set of methods; not a technology to be plugged in anywhere toward any end.

It is (and this was my point in beginning with Alverno) an enactment of a set of beliefs about the kind of work that matters on our campuses. Here are three:

1. That teaching is to be taken seriously and rewarded.

The issue of rewards may appear to be the more pointed one here, but let me pause for a moment on "taking teaching seriously"—the title, not incidentally, of a keynote address Pat Cross delivered at AAHE's 1986 National Conference. It is, I think, no accident that the spokesperson for "taking teaching seriously" also speaks for Classroom Assessment. Assessment is a way of enacting a greater seriousness about teaching; it also challenges us, I think, to look harder at what it would mean to be really serious about teaching.

I think, for instance, of a piece that appeared a year and a half ago in *Change* magazine, entitled "Claiming Ourselves as Teachers." In it, Diane Gillespie, a faculty member from the University of Nebraska, argues that public discourse about teaching is scarce and indeed thin because teaching itself has been privatized, pushed off into the margins of work. To be caught talking in public about teaching is, she says, "like discovering at a formal dinner that you're eating someone else's salad."

Gillespie's account of things is no doubt more true on some campuses than others—more likely to be true, one supposes, on research university campuses like her own. But what's worrisome is the possibility that it might be true even on the many more campuses that identify themselves as "teaching institutions," a label that seems too often to mean an absence of research but not necessarily the *presence* of sophisticated conversation about or inquiry into teaching and

learning.

What would that presence look like? It would look, I think, a lot like assessment at Harvard and SUNY-Fredonia and the LARC institutions: more conversation about teaching and learning, more *well-informed* and *collective* conversation that has a home in the institution.

The amount and character of discourse about teaching is one sign of the seriousness with which it is regarded. Another is rewards. A colleague here in D.C., Christine Young, recently wrote to me, "Until evidence of teaching effectiveness is taken seriously as a criterion for hiring, promotion, tenure, and merit raises, those faculty members who take teaching (and therefore assessment) seriously may continue to function at the margins."

That's a hard statement and a true one. If you follow assessment to its logical conclusion and ask what it's after—more student learning is a simple version of the answer—you come precisely to Young's point. Assessment will be an add-on, a marginal thing, until we reward teaching.

Interestingly, a method that's caught on in a big way (it was on this conference program prominently) for purposes of student assessment may be promising as well when it comes to evaluating teaching. I'm talking about portfolios, in this case "the teaching portfolio." We don't yet have the perfect formula for exactly what materials, what documents, could most usefully be displayed in a teaching portfolio. But the *fact* of the thing, a collection of evidence of teaching effectiveness—work samples—put on the table in the context of faculty evaluation, is already powerful. And the act of assembling evidence—like the fact of assessment itself—is likely to prompt better thought about how good teaching can be known and documented and rewarded, and what the institution *means* by "good teaching."

The issue of rewards for teaching gets a further, interesting spin when looked at in the light of assessment. As things now stand, all the rewards run to the individual. Assessment, with its principle of collective responsibility for student learning, implies a need for collective rewards. And, in fact, at Rhode Island College, with assistance from FIPSE, *departments* that demonstrate gains in student learning receive modest but significant rewards, such as increased travel funds or new equipment. That may be the proverbial exception that proves the rule; it's also very suggestive in thinking about assessment and how it might shape—reshape rather radically in this case—the conditions in which we do our work.

2. That assessment not only values teaching, it has a view of learning.

If you look at what's being done in the name of assessment on many campuses today, you see an emerging view of learning: What matters in this view is not just what students know but what they can *do* with what they know. What's at stake is the capacity to *perform*, to put what one knows into practice. And this focus on performance implies asking not just how much (seat time or credit hours) but how *good* (where all parties understand what constitutes "good").

This conception of learning as performance has yet a larger aim. Assessment presumes a kind of learning in which students—knowing what is expected of them—can with practice over time become their own best assessors. The object here is graduates who know their own strengths and weaknesses, can set and pursue goals, who monitor their own progress and learn from experience. There's considerable evidence now that students who are self-conscious about their processes as learners are better learners, that they learn more easily and deeply, and that their learning lasts. The fashionable label for the skills in question here is "metacognitive," but whatever you call them they represent a kind of learning that speaks to a belief that learning is personally liberating, self-empowering, and for *all* students.

3. Finally, that the culture of assessment is one in which we not only aim toward a particular kind of learning but hold ourselves accountable *for it; where accountability is not a dirty word (what "they" want), but part and parcel of the way we work.*

Most of the talk about accountability so far has been about that which runs from the institution to the state. A few years ago you heard this talked about mainly in terms of reporting requirements, comparing of scores, and so forth. More recently, and largely because of the work of Peter Ewell, institutions are finding more constructive ways to think about this

kind of accountability. But those that are taking assessment seriously have a different and additional slant on accountability, as well. While recognizing obligations to external publics, they want to look inside to deeper-running responsibilities.

A first of these runs from the institution to its students. Accountability here means delivering an education equal to that promised in recruitment, to the student's investment (not only of money but of time and effort), and to the demands of the student's postcollegiate life.

A second kind of accountability implied by assessment is that of students for their own learning. A number of institutions are now teaching students to "self-assess," to diagnose their own progress, to take responsibility for it, to ask the "what-it-adds-up-to" question of *themselves* as learners.

Third, and most important, there's the accountability educators have to one another, in our teaching and related work, on mutually agreed upon purposes and promises. This is the professional obligation that goes with the autonomy that faculty have traditionally enjoyed; it invites many ways of working with students, but asks also that the work each of us does individually contributes to the larger aims we've agreed upon together.

Seen this way, improvement and accountability—the oft-cited tension behind assessment—are, if ends of a continuum, ends that come around and meet.

Themes for the Future

By way of summary, let me begin—presumptuously perhaps—by making a point on behalf of all of us here who are faculty members . . . one that comes, in fact, from a letter I recently received from a faculty member from SUNY-Fredonia who's been involved in the work I described earlier. "I am concerned," Patrick Courts writes, "that assessment has become a self-regressive project concerned primarily with itself—concerned with more and better assessment but little beyond that. Personally, I have little use for it unless we allow the voices of those assessed to be heard." That's a right and timely caution. It's one AAHE tried to keep in mind when putting this conference together; it's one to keep a constant eye on in the future.

Second, we need more leadership for assessment. From top-level administrators we need the kind of leadership that expresses itself through rewards and incentives. And those need to be for assessment itself (designing and doing it) but also, more important, for the ends we want assessment to serve: better teaching and learning. But we need leadership that goes beyond "good management" here. Too often assessment is seen as an administrative problem to be solved with administrative responses. What we need is educational leadership. Ideas about learning. And we need that from administrators and from faculty and, yes, from students too.

Third, we need assessment that follows from the ways we think about learning, the kinds of learning we value. We need to get clear about what those are. And if, as I've argued, we value not just disembodied facts and knowledge but what students can do with what they know, we need assessments that call for and document those abilities. This, I take it, is what Grant Wiggins has in mind when he talks about "authentic assessment," assessment "composed of tasks we value," assessment that is "standards-setting."

Finally, we need more than assessment to get where we need to go—that is, to more and better student learning. This, in my view, is the single most important point to be learned from Alverno. Over and over I've been asked, Has assessment actually improved things at Alverno? How do you know? That's a complicated question, but *one* relevant answer is that the growth in student learning that Alverno has been able to document is a function not of any *one* thing but of a powerful culture of learning: a consistency and clarity of purpose; teaching aimed at that purpose; a sense of responsibility to students (and *by* students); a sophisticated, institutionwide conversation about learning; and a view of teaching as a valued professional activity.

Assessment—I think my Alverno colleagues would agree with me here—is essential to all of the above, but it's also part of a bigger picture. What's at stake is not assessment but the larger ways we work. ■

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